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An Integrative Geotourism Approach: Bridging Conflicts in Tourism Landscape Research

Arie Stoffelen & Dominique Vanneste

ABSTRACT Landscapes have a central position in many rural tourism destinations. They provide both assets and bounds for tourism development, and they indirectly provide the framework in which tourism is often envisaged as a regional development tool. However, the complexity of the interactions between landscapes and tourism has resulted in multiple and sometimes contrasting interpretations and research focuses dealing with landscape-tourism interactions. These contrasts have impeded constructive discussion, dynamism and progress in tourism landscape research in general. To manoeuvre in this complex and 'chaotic' field, we argue that a reinterpretation of the concept of geotourism provides a structured way forward. A focus on geotourism, although highly contested as a scientific concept, creates opportunities to bridge the gap between tourism-centred and landscape-centred strands that dominate and hence divide current tourism landscape research. The adapted geotourism framework presented here, in which geotourism is re-interpreted as an *approach* to study landscape-tourism interactions instead of currently contrasting definitions as either geological niche tourism or a form of sustainable tourism, builds on the idea that landscapes and tourism are inextricably connected. Landscapes provide natural and cultural assets for tourism development, with destination images being constructed by emplaced social and power relations. Simultaneously, the created 'tourismscape' has constitutive power to shape the landscape and the processes within it. By building on this continuum between tourism and landscape, the proposed geotourism approach provides a solid conceptual foundation for future research on landscape-tourism interactions and the interrelations between tourism landscapes and regional development.

Keywords: geotourism, physical landscape, cultural landscape, tourism landscape, regional development, power relations, political ecology

Introduction

Many rural and peripheral areas have natural and cultural assets, sometimes integrated in one inseparable entity, that can be capitalised on for tourism (Buckley, Ollenburg, & Zhong, 2008;

Oliver & Jenkins, 2003). While many of these places struggle with development constraints, the characteristics that result from socio-economic, cultural or physical peripherality may form or sustain locational features with touristic value and economic potential (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003). For this reason, numerous examples exist where tourism is seen as a strategy to diversify rural economies and deal with issues such as raising unemployment, negative population projections and aging of the population (e.g. Kauppila, Saarinen, & Leinonen, 2009; Oliver & Jenkins, 2003; Saarinen, 2003; Saxena, Clark, Oliver, & Ilbery, 2007; Sharpley, 2004).

In this context, landscapes are central in many rural tourism destinations. They can provide both natural and cultural resources for tourism and they indirectly frame the basis on which tourism can be used for regional development. However, the relations between landscapes and tourism are more complex than simply identifying that landscapes provide direct assets for tourism development and indirect opportunities for regional development by commodification of their natural and cultural characteristics (Terkenli, 2004). The multidisciplinarity of landscape and tourism research provides specific challenges to analyse this complexity. For instance, studies on the relations between landscapes and tourism are characterised by contestations that can be related to increased specialisation and different epistemological positions of natural and social scientists, resulting in a reduced 'middle ground' where both types of researchers meet (Castree, 2005). Moreover, the simultaneous two-way interactions between landscapes and tourism, with landscapes providing both a passive context and active shaping force for tourism development and tourism simultaneously shaping the landscape itself, provide additional complexity.

For these reasons, research on landscape-tourism interactions is characterised by numerous approaches that lack consensus and integration. Two broad focuses can be identified here:

(1) A *tourism-centred* research field, building on and applying a mostly social constructionist perspective to tourism and landscape commodification for tourism purposes (e.g. Knudsen, Metro-Roland, Soper, & Greer, 2008; Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007; Kolås, 2004; Ringer, 1998; Saarinen, 1998, 2004; Terkenli, 2002, 2004; Urry, 1995; Uusitalo, 2010). These studies include contrasting reflections on actual natural and cultural environments. Sometimes more abstract and symbolic reflections on landscape dominate over contemplation on tangible

and physical settings that have co-evolved with human activity (Buckley et al., 2008; Ringer, 1998). This tourism-centred focus on landscape-tourism interactions is thus only integrated and coherent to a limited extent.

(2) A *landscape-centred* research field, most explicitly connected to tourism with use of the concept of geotourism. However, this concept is highly contested. Different landscape interpretations, mainly of geological versus social geographical proponents of geotourism, have led to an absence of consensus on how to conceptualise the term. This internal conflict blurs the content of the concept as well as insights in its added value. It has also led to a disconnection between geotourism and broader tourism research.

Moreover, only limited efforts are done to facilitate discussion between researchers from both fields, which is partly the consequence of the mentioned contrasts in disciplinary starting points. At the same time, the shortage on discussion reinforces this situation and further reduces the 'middle ground' (Castree, 2005) between natural and social scientists. Hence, the complexity of the interrelations between landscapes and tourism and the consequential absence of a constructive discussion has hampered interdisciplinary insights in landscape-tourism interactions and has resulted in a scattered research domain with limited dynamism. In this context, the aim of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework that allows (1) to bridge this current fragmentation of research on landscape-tourism interactions; (2) to provide a solid basis for future research on landscape-tourism interactions, and by extension regional development.

We propose a re-interpretation of the concept of geotourism to deal with this. Geotourism has a high potential to provide an umbrella framework for tourism landscape research because the concept subsumes both a focus on physical landscape elements and on regional identity in tourism development. However, we argue that a re-conceptualisation is necessary to move beyond current internal contrasts and its current disconnection from broader landscape and tourism research. This will be solved by presenting geotourism as an *approach* to interpret and study the interactions between landscapes and tourism, providing a middle way between the landscape-centred geotourism interpretation and more tourism-centred studies. This contributes in several ways to tourism landscape research. First, it allows to more actively reflect on the role of both tangible (material, physical) and intangible (immaterial, symbolic)

aspects of landscapes and their interactions in rural tourism destinations. It also provides an integrative approach that could be a starting point to move beyond the fragmented situation within research on landscape-tourism interactions in general and the geotourism debate in specific. Finally, because of its conceptual bridging of perspectives it forms a stable basis for future research on, for instance, the regional development potential of tourism in rural areas.
This paper is divided in three parts. The first part covers a general review of the concept of landscape and, inspired by aspects of political ecology, it thereby provides the frame of reference for the rest of the paper. This framework is necessary to discuss tourism-centred and landscape-centred perspectives on tourism landscape research in the second part. This will be integrated in the final section in what we will call the landscape-tourism continuum. The landscape-tourism continuum forms the foundation for the new interpretation of geotourism as an approach instead of a closed concept. The paper ends with some implications of this approach for future research on the regional development capacity of tourism.

Landscape: a socio-spatial benchmark for analysis

In order to develop a framework that integrates different research strands on tourism landscape research, we will make some short and general reflections on mainstream landscape literature in this section to position our research. This will be used to create a benchmark for analysis of tourism-centred and landscape-centred perspectives on tourism landscape studies.

The landscape concept

The landscape concept is covered by interpretations that range between ‘nature-only’ and purely social constructionist perspectives. Most social geographers, the authors of this paper included, position themselves in this spectrum by interpreting landscape as a holistic, integrative concept in which natural, cultural, social and economic spheres overlap, interact and integrate (Antrop, 2005, 2006; Higgins, Mahon, & McDonagh, 2012; Jansen-Verbeke, 2008). As defined by Antrop (2006), landscape is ‘a synthetic and integrating concept that refers both to a material-physical reality, originating from a continuous dynamic interaction between natural processes and human activity, and to the immaterial existential values and symbols of which the landscape is the signifier’ (p. 188).
According to Isachenko (2009) cultural landscapes are multi-layered entities with different spatial spheres that overlap and impact each other. They are not neutral and devoid of

meaning because of the presence of socially constructed mental or symbolic layers (Isachenko, 2009). Sampson and Goodrich (2009) note that these intangible meanings are constructed on the basis of tangible objects that are present in the material and physical environment. These physical settings have a certain agency this way, yet they are simultaneously re-interpreted and re-shaped with the consequence that the spatial landscape characteristics themselves change as well (Isachenko, 2009; Sampson & Goodrich, 2009). Consequently, the landscape not only structures the creation of senses of place, but it is also a physical and symbolic product of those place-based meanings (Cunningham, 2009; Greider & Garkovich, 1994; Nogué & Vicente, 2004).

The mental landscape layers can be multiple and various as they reflect personal experiences and socio-cultural frameworks of the viewers, and their content can be contested as to which vision is dominant (Blaikie, 1995; Greider & Garkovich, 1994). Empowered stakeholders have the capacity to give physical and symbolic form to landscapes so that they can also shape the meaning that is imbued in landscapes (Blaikie, 1995; Douglas, 2014; Greer, Donnelly, & Ricky, 2008; Greider & Garkovich, 1994; Kolås, 2004; Neumann, 2011). To deal with these knowledge claims, all potentially affected stakeholders, some of which may operate on different spatial scales and locations, should be included in the management of landscape processes (Greider & Garkovich, 1994; Higgins et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2002; Paasi, 1996; Wray, Espiner, & Perkins, 2010).

Landscape-tourism interactions and political ecology

In order to move from mainstream landscape literature to a benchmark for comparison in a tourism landscape research context with highly contrasting landscape interpretations at its basis, a short reflection on the interdisciplinary field of political ecology is useful. Political ecology provides a critical and ‘interdisciplinary lens’ (Douglas, 2014, p. 1) to study human-environment interactions, environmental conflict and the inequitable benefits which stakeholders obtain from natural resource use (Douglas, 2014; Robbins, 2012; Stonich, 1998). Based on the necessity to analyse ecological issues from a political economy perspective (Stonich, 1998; Wolf, 1972), a central focus is on social relations and attributes of power of stakeholders on multiple scales that together shape how nature and society are socially constructed and discursively connected (Douglas, 2014). Neumann (2011) adds that symbolic meanings in production and consumption of landscapes, for instance for tourism purposes, are

multiple and contested. Power positions shape dominant discourses in the social construction of nature and determine who profits and who is disadvantaged in a social, economic and ecological sense from commodification of these natural resources (Blaikie, 1995; Douglas, 2014; Neumann, 2011; Stonich, 1998).

At the same time, the interdisciplinary characteristics of political ecology mean that on top of the social construction and political economy of nature, ecological and environmental contexts need to be explicitly taken into account (Douglas, 2014; Neumann, 2011; Robbins, 2012). Therefore, Douglas (2014) states that 'a contextual analysis of political, economic, social, and ecological relations within the foci of tourism geography studies has the potential to provide a broader understanding of the power structures concerning people and nature' (p. 5).

Political ecology thus brings together natural and social sciences while maintaining a central focus on potential conflict and inequality in commodification of landscape resources for tourism purposes (Stonich, 1998). This provides potential to integrate the currently fragmented and multidisciplinary tourism landscape studies that struggle to overcome friction between scientific disciplines (Neumann, 2011; Stonich, 1998). Combining political ecology reflections with the overview of landscape literature above thus offers an interdisciplinary and critical frame of comparison for tourism-centred and landscape-centred approaches in tourism landscape research. This comparison can then be used to assess how geotourism can be re-conceptualised to overcome the fragmentation of both approaches. In this context, we can summarise the landscape interpretation of this paper that is at the basis of analysis of tourism-centred and landscape-centred perspectives as:

(1) Holistic, located at the intersection of natural-physical and socio-cultural spheres with constant interaction and co-evolution of both;
(2) Including an explicit reflection on the material, environmental and/or physical context of the area that frames the social construction of meaning and territorial identity;
(3) Not neutral and hence not devoid of meaning, with multiple place-based meanings being framed by and simultaneously reshaping the tangible environment in which they are created;

(4) Not static and 'out there' but actively produced and consumed by a multitude of stakeholders operating in different locations and on different scales;
(5) Including power relations that provide the direction of these processes, that affect which natural resources are commodified, and that determine who profits from this.

Tourism-centred and landscape-centred perspectives on tourism landscape research

Landscapes provide both opportunities and limits for tourism development in many destinations, and they thus also indirectly impact the role of tourism as a regional development tool. Yet, the fragmentation of tourism landscape research into tourism-centred and landscape-centred approaches hinders integration of scientific efforts to study the complex interactions between landscapes and tourism. While tourism-centred research has a comparable starting point to the benchmark as developed above, the landscape-centred research strand is diverse. These two perspectives will be consecutively discussed in more detail in this section of the paper.

Tourism-centred perspectives

In tourism-centred perspectives on landscape-tourism interactions a landscape framework is used to support tourism-focused research. In general, these perspectives build on the landscape notions as elaborated on in the previous section and apply it to a tourism context. However, because the tourism context rather than the landscape framework is the main object of study, this perspective is blurred by different researchers reflecting on material and physical environments with different levels of intensity. While some tourism landscape studies following this approach explicitly highlight the tangible landscape characteristics that frame the study, this is sometimes done more implicitly, both in description of tourism resources of the destination and in measurement of landscape valuation by visitors (Haukeland, Grue, & Veisten, 2010).
Moreover, a key research theme in tourism-centred studies refers to 'placelessness' and stereotyped representations of landscapes rather than the emplaced material and physical touristic assets of landscapes themselves (Saarinen, 2004; Terkenli, 2002, 2004). This way, symbolic notions of landscape are seen to be constructed in a spatial context that is

represented for tourism development, without explicitly focusing on what interactions between environment and society this context entails (Buckley et al., 2008).

Moving beyond simple observations that landscapes provide resources and bounds for tourism development, Knudsen et al. (2008) stress that tourists are searching to decipher the identity of the destination and its inhabitants. By 'reading' the landscape they create meaning and an understanding of the destination landscape (Knudsen et al., 2008, 2007). Knudsen et al. (2008) thereby recognise that place-based meanings are not limited to senses of place of insiders or residents of the landscape but also include those of tourists (Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002). Hence, these meanings rather than their possessors are localised and embedded in the landscape (Williams & Stewart, 1998). The sense of place creation by tourists is an important individual and heterogenous process as everyone experiences landscapes and thus destinations in their own ways, using building blocks from personal experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds (Knudsen et al., 2008; Uusitalo, 2010; Wray et al., 2010).

Yet simultaneously, elements of the landscape are commodified for tourism purposes to present a recognisable, stable and unified destination image (Ringer, 1998; Saarinen, 2004; Urry, 2002). This process forces senses of place into context, thereby institutionalising understandings of the landscape (Knudsen et al., 2008). An important process to homogenise meaning is consequently present in tourism development as well. This often leads to a high selectivity in destination images used and senses of place represented with a focus on outsider values (Knudsen et al., 2008; Terkenli, 2002; Urry, 1995). Examples of such selectivity can be the reduction of tourism landscapes or 'tourismscapes' to sceneries or romanticised notions of landscapes, fuelling the creation of a place-myth of the destination (Butler, 1998; Daugstad, 2008; Jansen-Verbeke, 2008; Kneafsey, 2001; Knudsen et al., 2008; Ringer, 1998; Saarinen, 2004; Sharpley, 2004; Urry, 1995). Another type of outsider interpretation and representation of the landscape is an 'expert' explanation of the value of its physical, ecological or cultural settings, aiming to present a neutral or objectified image of the destination.

Because of their selectivity, both the romanticised and expert interpretation and representation could lead to conflict due to potential alienation of users of the landscape with different place-based meanings (Ashworth, 2003; Daugstad, 2008; Terkenli, 2002; Waterton, 2005). For instance, nature-based interpretations can in some cases bypass the actual integration between

physical and socio-cultural accounts of the destination (Buckley et al., 2008), but may also lead to discomfort and hostility among some users because some narratives can be neglected (Cantrill & Senecah, 2001; Cunningham, 2009). In other words, tourism is an agent in the creation of both spatial and mental layers of the landscape that may clash with already present layers of others (Isachenko, 2009).

Cunningham (2009) shows this potential contrast between tourism landscapes and cultural landscapes with a case-study on the Japanese Ogasawara archipelago. He identifies a mismatch between the tourismscape and the cultural landscape of the so-called *Obeikei*; a small cultural group of descendents of western people that settled on the islands in the beginning of the 19th century. The current tourismscape is dominated by nature-based reflections in which the cultural landscape of the *Obeikei* that developed in interaction with these natural settings is underrepresented. This construction further marginalises and disempowers this group and limits their social action. Cunningham (2009) concludes that '[i]t reminds us that landscapes cannot be separated from the peopled activities that occur within them' and that landscapes consequently change with the evolution of social practices of its inhabitants (p. 232).

Landscape-centred perspectives

On the other side of the spectrum of research on landscape-tourism interactions, studies with landscape-centred perspectives generally see landscapes as tangible tourism assets while the commodification of these territorial resources should contribute to their sustainability and conservation. An active reflection is made on the material and physical characteristics that constitute the landscape of study, in contrast to rather vague notions of the spatial context or the focus on stereotyped landscape representations in tourism-centred perspectives. Yet, the complexity of tourism is often neglected by implying an intrinsic attractiveness of territorial resources in tourism destinations. This has led to lacking recognition of the specific contribution of tourism as a scientific discipline within the landscape-centred literature, simultaneously marginalising the position of this perspective in mainstream tourism research.

The most notable of these perspectives is the concept of geotourism. While its dominant conceptualisation builds on a physical science point of departure supported mainly by geologists and geomorphologists, contrasting (social) geographical interpretations exist as well. After discussing these different conceptualisations, the second part of this section will

look more specifically at internal similarities and contestations in geotourism research. This will then be used to compare and integrate with tourism-centred perspectives on tourism landscape research in an attempt to overcome the barrier between both approaches.

Contested geotourism interpretations

The geotourism concept was originally defined in the 1990s to highlight conservation of geological and geomorphological heritage by promoting it to tourists (Hose & Vasiljević, 2012; Hose, 2012). Thomas Hose described geotourism in an article published in 1995 as 'the provision of interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site (including its contribution to the development of the Earth sciences) beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation' (as cited in Hose, 2012, p. 9). Hence, it builds on the interpretation that educating people about the significance of geological settings provides a stimulus to protect the geological patrimony. With exception of Gordon (2012), this approach to geotourism dominantly builds on 'geo-interpretation' of experts rather than experiences of tourists (Hose, 2012). These experts have a didactical task to interpret the geological settings and communicate their significance to a broad audience (Dowling, 2011; Farsani, Coelho, & Costa, 2011; Gordon, 2012; Hose, 2012; Newsome, Dowling, & Leung, 2012).

The consequential domination of supposedly neutral outsider perspectives on the landscape in many geological geotourism accounts can be highlighted by a case-study of Newsome and Dowling (2006) of Wave Rock in Western Australia. The authors state that attention to geo-interpretation by trained interpreters would significantly increase the enjoyment and sense of wonder of visitors of Wave Rock because of their increased geological understanding. This could be achieved by extending travel itineraries so that they also include geologically related sites in the flat and touristically undeveloped Wave Rock surroundings. Newsome and Dowling (2006) conclude that increasing the interest of visitors by providing sufficient interpretation could finally result in 'appropriate visitor behaviour at the site' (p.15) and could hence foster geoconservation.

The contrasting geographical perspective on geotourism has a more holistic focus (see Table 1). Developed by the National Geographic Society, this (social) geographical understanding of geotourism stresses regional uniqueness and identity together with a lesser focus on geological and geomorphological heritage as the object of tourism (Lew, 2002; National

Geographic, n.d.; Stueve, Cook, & Drew, 2002). Geotourism is defined as '[t]ourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of residents' (National Geographic, n.d., p. 1). This way, it is seen as being closely connected to sustainable tourism while adding a specific focus on the geographical character of the destination (Bosak, Boley, & Zaret, 2010; Farsani et al., 2011; Hose, 2012; Lew, 2002). Buckley (2003) states that this does not limit geotourism to natural and rural sites. Any place with a tourism product specifically building on its locational character may be at the centre of geotourism. One example is gambling in Las Vegas (Buckley, 2003).

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Table 1. General summary of the comparison between geological and (social) geographical geotourism interpretations, highlighting the contestation of the geotourism concept.

	'Geological' geotourism	**'Geographical' geotourism**
Type of tourism	Niche tourism: distinctive 'subsector'	Form of sustainable tourism
Focus	Geo(morpho)logical heritage	Identity of (mostly but not exclusively) rural locations
Goal	Geoconservation by education	Sustaining the geographical character of the destination
Key contributions	Dowling, 2011; Farsani, Coelho, & Costa, 2011; Gordon, 2012; Hose & Vasiljević, 2012; Hose, 2012; Newsome, Dowling, & Leung, 2012; Newsome & Dowling, 2006	Bosak, Boley, & Zaret, 2010; Buckley, 2003; Farsani et al., 2011; Gordon, 2012; Lew, 2002; National Geographic, n.d.; Stueve, Cook, & Drew, 2002

The division between 'geographical' and 'geological' approaches is blurred somewhat by a few scholars who depart from either the geological or the geographical geotourism interpretation and make slight adjustments to this. One of the most influential stakeholders to make such changes is UNESCO, which manages the well-established Global Geopark Network (GGN). This organisation uses a geological starting point but also states that 'the synergy between geodiversity, biodiversity and culture (...) must be highlighted as an integral part of each Geopark' (UNESCO, 2010, p. 3) since separation of natural, social and cultural spheres is often impossible (Farsani et al., 2011).

Landscape interpretations and tourism foci in geotourism

The main factor that hinders constructive discussion and the development of an integrated geotourism movement is the contrasting landscape interpretation of the different geotourism conceptualisations, reflecting difficulties to deal with rivalry among disciplines and the multidisciplinary nature of tourism landscape research in general. Earlier, we interpreted landscapes as holistic phenomena that are spatially explicit, not neutral, that are actively produced and consumed and that include power relations. Comparison of the landscape interpretations of both geological and geographical geotourism perspectives with this political ecology-inspired benchmark shows clear contrasts (see Table 2).

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Table 2. Comparison of the landscape interpretation of geological and (social) geographical geotourism perspectives, using the landscape benchmark explained earlier in this paper. (-) means not reflected on; (+) means included in the interpretation; (+/-) means partial inclusion in the perspective.

	Landscape benchmark	**'Geological' geotourism**	**'Geographical' geotourism**
Holistic	+	-	+
Explicit spatial reflection	+	+	+/-
Neutral	-	+	+/-
Actively produced and consumed	+	-	+/-
Including power relations	+	-	-

The geological interpretation of landscape is narrow as only tangible geological and geomorphological characteristics, mostly spectacular settings at specific 'geosites' that can be interpreted as geoheritage, are taken into account (Hose, 2012; Newsome et al., 2012; Newsome & Dowling, 2006). These landscapes are seen as neutral since experts can provide 'objective' interpretations of their significance (Dowling, 2011; Hose & Vasiljević, 2012; Hose, 2012). No power relations in processes of production and consumption are taken into account as the landscape-related processes that are deemed most relevant are related to geological and geomorphological activity (see Dowling, 2011; Newsome & Dowling, 2006). In contrast, geographical landscape interpretations in geotourism do look at landscapes as holistic entities where natural, cultural and socio-economic contexts are integrated (National Geographic, n.d.; Stueve et al., 2002). Like in geological geotourism accounts, landscapes are mostly referred to in terms of tangible features and physical assets first. However, geographical geotourism accounts are also comparable to tourism-centred approaches in the sense that references to the uniqueness of the destination also include more intangible connotations and valuations (Bosak et al., 2010; Farsani et al., 2011). Moreover, landscapes are partly seen as non-neutral entities as they contain and reflect the identity of the region and its inhabitants. Power relations in processes of production and consumption of these landscapes are only reflected on implicitly, limited to the notion that tourism sometimes leads to erosion of the uniqueness of the regional landscape that fuelled tourism in the first place (Stueve et al., 2002).

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These landscape contestations also seep down to the tourism focus in geotourism. Reflecting a clear nature-culture divide, geotourism is seen in most geological perspectives as a distinctive subsector that can be contrasted with other clearly separable tourism niches such as ecotourism and cultural tourism (Dowling & Newsome, 2006; Dowling, 2011; Hose, 2012; Newsome et al., 2012). In contrast, the geographical approach sees tourism as a broad and global phenomenon in which an array of products and experiences that relate to the identity of the destination are incorporated (Bosak et al., 2010; Stueve et al., 2002).

Yet, when disregarding different meanings that are given to the landscape concept, there are also similarities between both geotourism strands. Both the geological and geographical perspective see tourism as a way to present and simultaneously sustain the landscape. Landscapes provide inherent assets for tourism development, and the interest of tourists in these tourism products can lead to recognition of their significance and financial means to support and protect them.

Similarly, both focus on physical assets first and have only limited interest in power relations in the commodification of these territorial resources. Nevertheless, by deconstructing National Geographic geotourism mapguides Bosak et al. (2010) convincingly show that despite aims to present regional uniqueness, the selection and subsequent mapping of territorial resources and amenities result in information provision that may be seen by tourists as authoritative but that in reality is highly selective as power is hidden in the expert claims. In their case-study of the Crown of the Continent in Montana (USA) and Alberta and British Columbia (Canada), Bosak et al. (2010) highlight that the intrinsic aim to present the area as an attractive natural and cultural tourism destination already imbues the mapguide with the ideology and hence selectivity of National Geographic. Moreover, despite several public participation rounds the final decision on which businesses and tourism attractions to include and exclude was made by the most powerful stakeholders, and the ideal scale of the map was adjusted accordingly. The resulting map mostly reflects the values of empowered tourism agencies in Montana and not necessarily the values of local actors. Bosak et al. (2010) conclude that ‘the mapguides, if successful in promoting geotourism, will produce a new place myth for the area thereby changing the character of the landscape that National Geographic and the ideals of geotourism are trying to preserve’ (p. 478).

Despite the more abstract similarity in tourism foci, much mutual critique exists between the perspectives where the conceptualisations are seen as either too narrow (the geological

perspective) or too broad (the geographical perspective) to be useful (Buckley, 2003; Dowling & Newsome, 2006). This internal division has resulted in a relatively marginal scientific position of the geotourism concept in general.

Landscape-tourism continuum: a new geotourism approach

Apart from the internal contestations in geotourism, which hinder uniting research efforts and hence also the recognition of the concept in broader landscape and tourism research, a fundamental difference in understanding landscape-tourism interactions can be noted as well between landscape-centred and tourism-centred perspectives.

In the introduction of this paper we posited that the relations between landscapes and tourism are more complex than just recognising that landscapes provide resources for tourism development. Yet, both geotourism conceptualisations basically see the interrelations between tourism and landscapes as a one-to-one relation. In this landscape-centred research field, landscapes are seen to simply fuel tourism development and tourism is seen to induce the creation of awareness of the significance of landscapes. The spending of tourists provides revenues to sustain these landscapes (see Figure 1). Landscape and tourism are thus both seen as closed boxes with tourism being external to the landscape. According to these visions, the landscape itself has its own intrinsic geological or regional identity-related characteristics and is not shaped by tourism development apart from addition of informative infrastructure or development of mapguides. In these interpretations, tourism commodification does not result in own geographies, place myths and (contested) tourism landscapes (Bosak et al., 2010). Hence, the remark that tourism development also has a constitutive power for the content of complex, holistic landscapes (Ashworth, 2003; Ringer, 1998; Saarinen, 2004) remains largely unanswered in landscape-centred approaches to tourism landscape studies.

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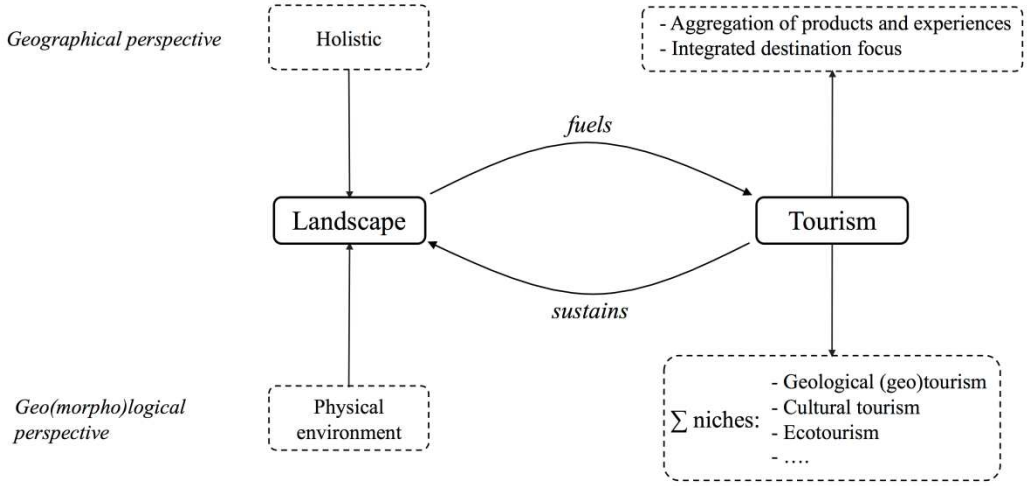

Figure 1. Landscape and tourism as closed boxes in geotourism interpretations of landscape-tourism interactions, contrasting with tourism-centred perspectives in which tourism and landscape are interpreted as a continuum.

In contrast, in tourism-centred perspectives the boundaries between the landscape and tourism boxes are seen as less rigid. The distinction between landscapes and tourismscapes highlights this. While landscapes provide assets and bounds for the production of tourismscapes, the former are also shaped by the latter (Ashworth, 2003; Ringer, 1998; Saarinen, 2004). Despite the often contested commodification of landscapes for tourism, the images used to present the destination to the outside can be used to re-negotiate the content of the landscape and the identity of its inhabitants (Kolås, 2004; Ringer, 1998). As stated by Hughes (1998), 'leisure and tourism, being central to social life, are primary determinants of space in their own right' (p. 19). Tourism landscapes and (cultural) landscapes are thus not the same but they are inherently connected and inseparable to a large extent, providing a continuum of relations between both. The organisational capacity and power relations between stakeholders, influencing the way territorial resources are configured for tourism purposes, importantly determine the outcome of such situations and the mental landscape layers that come to dominate (Douglas, 2014; Hughes, 1998; Isachenko, 2009; Jansen-Verbeke, 2013; Knudsen et al., 2008, 2007; Saarinen, 2004).

The continuum of landscape-tourism dialectics

In short, a double barrier exists in tourism landscape research. The first barrier is the internal division in geotourism that hinders integration and a broad recognition of the concept due to

ambiguity in its use. This has reduced explicit reflections on tangible physical landscapes in the overall tourism landscape research domain that is currently dominated by tourism-centred perspectives. The second barrier is the external division between landscape-centred and tourism-centred perspectives, dominantly formed by fundamental differences in understanding how tourism and landscapes constitute each other.

Figure 2 shows a conceptual model in which geotourism is re-interpreted as an approach to bridge this gap between tourism-centred and landscape-centred perspectives as well as the internal conflicts in current geotourism conceptualisations. Following the political ecology-inspired framework to move beyond disconnected studies of political, economic, social and ecological relations in tourism research, this model builds on but is different from current approaches because of its explicit 'middle ground' position between the different disciplinary perspectives of tourism landscape research (Castree, 2005; Douglas, 2014).

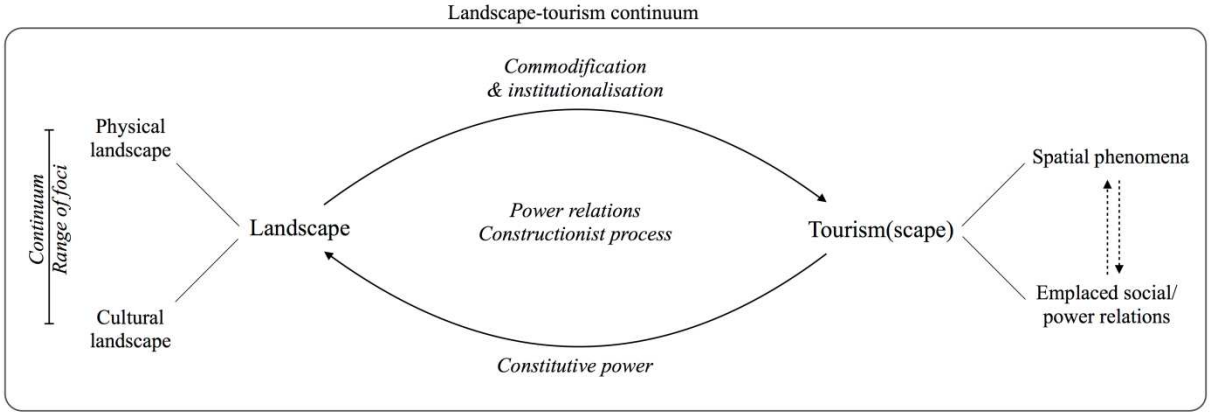

Figure 2. A conceptual model of geotourism as an approach to integrate currently fragmented studies on landscape-tourism interactions.

The re-conceptualisation, as schematised in figure 2, departs from the geotourism notion since the concept subsumes both a geological focus on physical landscape elements and a geographical emphasis on regional identity in tourism development. This way, the same diversity that creates the internal contestation in geotourism provides opportunities to establish a middle way between tourism-centred and landscape-centred visions. Yet, in contrast to current geotourism conceptualisations, we assert that landscapes and tourism need to be studied in a single framework as they are inextricably connected. The complex interactions between landscapes and tourismscapes, as approached in tourism-centred perspectives, should therefore be integrated in the geotourism debate. This implies adding

reflections on the mode of commodification and institutionalisation of emplaced territorial resources for tourism, and the constitutive power of tourism development on the landscape itself, on top of explicit awareness that landscapes provide tangible spatial resources for tourism that may or may not be outstandingly spectacular. Hence, studies on landscape-tourism interactions should include political, economic, social and physical spheres as well (Douglas, 2014).

Combining a political ecology rationale with an interpretation of landscapes as non-neutral entities, the selective representation of place-based meanings in the tourismscape as a result of power imbalances also has a central position in the conceptual model. To move beyond the consequential contestations of which mental landscape layers are represented for tourism purposes, an inclusive governance and networking practice should empower all tourism-related stakeholders (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003; Saxena et al., 2007; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008). This should lead to more recognition and integration of diverse senses of place in the tourismscape, reducing possible mismatches and conflict that result from contrasting place-based meanings of stakeholder groups (Ashworth, 2003; Cantrill & Senecah, 2001; Waterton, 2005).

Moreover, adopting the explicit reflection on tangible landscape settings from landscape-centred approaches, we argue that physical settings do indeed matter in this context (see also Sampson & Goodrich, 2009; Stedman, 2003). Creation of sense of place does not take place in a vacuum or does not 'arise out of thin air' (Stedman, 2003, p. 671); explicitly spatial (and hence both physical and cultural) landscape settings play a structuring role in this process. Apart from residents this is also the case for tourists as they search for clues in the landscape to create their own sense of place in the destination, confirming the necessity to include a broad range of place-based meanings in tourismscape management processes (Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002; Knudsen et al., 2008; Williams & Stewart, 1998).

Therefore, as highlighted in figure 2, we argue that the landscape-tourismscape dialectics as discussed above should be recognised in order for geotourism to find a middle way in the currently fragmented tourism landscape research field and to provide a stable conceptual basis for future tourism landscape research. The political ecology-inspired model reinterprets geotourism as an *approach* that builds on these ideas that landscapes and tourism form a continuum rather than as a closed concept that refers to either geological niche tourism or a form of sustainable tourism. It provides a potential for internal integration of geotourism

perspectives because it does not inherently exclude or favour either geological or geographical perspectives. While the new geotourism approach does still start from an explicit focus on territorial settings, no *a priori* decision on a specific position within the continuum of physical and cultural landscapes, or a dominant focus on either tangible or intangible landscape characteristics, is included in the conceptualisation itself (see Figure 2). Practically, applying the geotourism approach to geologically-oriented case-studies such as of Wave Rock (Newsome & Dowling, 2006) means including explicit reflections on the commodification and institutionalisation processes of tourism in the area, how this interacts with emplaced social and power relations and finally how this also constitutes the Wave Rock landscape in a physical *and* symbolical way. On the other hand, more geographical case-studies such as of Ogasawara (Cunningham, 2009) and the Crown of the Continent (Bosak et al., 2010) should explicitly focus on the concrete role of tangible spatial settings in the landscape-tourismscape system of the destinations and how these are represented and impacted in the tourismscape. Finally, the re-interpretation of geotourism provides potential for integration of the concept in more mainstream tourism research as well as in practices of tourism development, for instance in widening the development possibilities and scope of geoparks, because of its broader theoretical foundation and applicability. It allows for more tourism-centred research in geotourism studies, and for more integration of landscape-centred perspectives in mainstream tourism research.

Conclusion

The current fragmentation and lack of discussion in tourism landscape studies has led to a research field that is characterised by high complexity and relative chaos (Daugstad, 2008). The proposed geotourism approach renders a quite straightforward way to deal with this. Departing from the different but connected concepts of landscape and tourismscape, the reinterpretation of geotourism as an approach instead of a closed concept provides a structured mode of manoeuvring in this ‘chaotic’ field. It serves as an integrative perspective that could help both research on landscape-tourism interactions in general and the geotourism debate in specific move forward from the current standstill that is partly the consequence of the lack of conceptualisation consensus.

By building on the idea that landscapes and tourism form a continuum rather than disintegrated concepts, the proposed geotourism approach harmonises tourism-centred and

landscape-centred approaches to tourism landscapes studies. Moreover, it allows to more actively reflect on the interrelations between material-physical and symbolic aspects of landscapes in rural destinations that together fuel sense of place creation by tourists, and the constitutive power of tourism development in the landscapes of the destination. This reaffirms the key role of tourism as a research field in tourism landscape studies, despite its paradoxical non-presence in geological geotourism accounts (Hose & Vasiljević, 2012; Hose, 2012). Following Knudsen et al. (2008) it also highlights the central position of landscapes in tourism, moving beyond simplified notions that landscapes merely provide assets and bounds for tourism development.

The integrative geotourism approach presented in this paper has implications for future research, most profoundly in relation to the regional development capacity of tourism. Earlier we noted that landscapes indirectly influence regional development opportunities because of their direct impact on tourism production and consumption. For this reason, most geotourism accounts include simple references to rural or sustainable development. These contain ideas that competitive advantages could be derived from the presentation of spectacular geological or identity-related territorial settings, providing a basis for regional development and conservation. For example, Farsani et al. (2011) state that '[w]hen geotourists move to geoparks, the money moves in the same direction' (p. 68). These movements increase the potential for entrepreneurial involvement and cross-selling of local products and crafts that can fuel local economies (Dowling, 2011; Farsani et al., 2011; Newsome et al., 2012). This somewhat simplistic sustainable development logic presumes that this money will be to the advantage of the whole destination community. However, political ecology shows us that recognising the centrality of emplaced stakeholder interactions and underlying power balances in the development of tourismscapes is central in assessing which environments are commodified for tourism and who gets to profit from this (Douglas, 2014; Stonich, 1998). Integrative management practices are therefore required to reduce the selectivity in representations of place-based meanings in the tourismscape and to empower all stakeholders (Saxena et al., 2007; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008). Hence, a combination of geotourism's explicit reflection on emplaced resources and senses of place with a sound framework of networking, power relations and stakeholder interactions is necessary to critically study the regional development effects of tourism. The concept of integrated rural tourism may be useful for this as it focuses on the role of endogenous, embedded and empowering networks in sustainable

tourism development (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003; Saxena et al., 2007; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008). Future research on the connection between geotourism and tourism governance and networking could provide a way to unravel the indirect links between landscapes, tourism and regional development in more detail.

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